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ABSTRACT

A review of the literature on human resource development (HRD) and HRD programs is presented. Topics include: (1) two definitions of HRD (Nadler 1983 and the American Society for Training and Development); (2) an analysis of those definitions; (3) the importance of HRD to organizations and individuals; (4) descriptions of types of HRD programs including professional programs, skill and technical programs, managerial programs, compensatory programs, and worker programs; (5) statistics on amount of money spent, number of employees involved, and largest providers of HRD programs; (6) ways in which education can link with business and industry to provide HRD including development of a mutual relationship, research, and exchange of personnel; and (7) a brief discussion of the future of HRD. A five-item bibliography of references is included, two of which are available from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system. (DC)

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by

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OVERVIEW

ERIC® DIGEST NO. 28

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT: AN INTRODUCTION

What Is Human Resource Development?

Human resource development, commonly known as HRD, is a concept used to describe job-related education and training. Nadler (1983) defines human resource development as—

- organized learning experiences,
- in a given period of time,
- to bring about the possibility of performance change or general growth for the individual within an organization (p. 1).

The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) has also developed a definition for HRD. According to ASTD, HRD is:

> Identifying, assessing, and—through planned learning—helping develop key competencies (knowledge, skill, attitudes) which enable individuals to perform current or future jobs. (McLagan 1982, p. 18)

Both of these definitions stress the fact that the focus of HRD is on planned/organized learning activities. HRD includes both formal and informal learning experiences. Formal learning activities are those that follow a prescribed course of instruction and are usually held away from the work site, while informal learning activities occur primarily in the process of performing job functions and are usually known as on-the-job training (OJT).

Also inherent in both definitions is the expectation of changed job performance through participation in HRD activities. This change may be brought about through the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, or from changes in attitudes. While it is true that participation in human resource development activities cannot ensure behavioral change, HRD can be a vehicle for providing learners with additional options for behavior and performance.

HRD encompasses all job-related educational programs, but within that context there are different areas of learning activities. Nadler (1983) classifies three types of activities as follows:

- **Training**—HRD activities related to an individual's current job are considered training.
- **Education**—Education is the term used to refer to those HRD activities that prepare persons for future jobs.
- **Development**—Activities classified as development are directed toward individual and organizational growth.

Why Is HRD Important?

Organizations are generally considered to be the main beneficiaries of HRD activities. They develop and conduct programs designed to improve employee performance so that they can reach certain organizational goals and objectives. HRD also contributes to increased productivity.

Individuals, however, also benefit from participation in HRD. HRD is important to individuals because it—

- helps them acquire good work habits and attitudes,
- assists them in resolving problems related to their work,
- allows them to achieve personal growth objectives,
- provides them with increased job mobility.

What Program Areas Constitute HRD?

There are HRD activities designed to cover virtually every aspect of performance in the workplace. Thus, it is difficult to develop systematic classifications that describe the total field. Nadler (1983) has identified some major program areas that are representative of the variation and complexity of HRD. These include the following:

- **Professional Programs**—Programs designed for professionals may be either training (i.e., related to the individual's current job), or education (i.e., preparation for a future position such as a manager or an administrator). The rapid rate of change in information, knowledge, and technology has made it increasingly important for professionals to keep up-to-date.
- **Skill and Technical Programs**—Skills training and technical programs are designed to develop or improve the competencies needed by employees working in skilled trades or technical occupations. Recent changes in the workplace due to changing technologies have increased the need for a higher level of technical skills among blue-collar and clerical workers. This area of HRD, therefore, is receiving more attention.
- **Managerial Programs**—Managers are the decision makers within organizations and are integral to the organization's success. Keeping managers current through HRD programs is essential for the well-being of the organization. It is not surprising, then, that studies show that more attention and financial resources are directed toward HRD for managers than for any other group. Although the term "management development" is frequently used to describe HRD for managers, they have a need for all three activity areas (i.e., training, education, and development).
- **Compensatory Programs**—Compensatory programs are those HRD activities designed for groups and individuals who have not been full participants in the work force. Through such legislation as the Manpower Development and Training Act, the

Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, and now the Job Training Partnership Act, the federal government has provided funds for compensatory programs. Organizations also frequently sponsor compensatory programs for targeted populations, including minorities, women, disadvantaged, and handicapped (Lancaster and Berne 1981).

- **Worker Programs**—Programs for workers are those provided by unions for their employees and members. Worker programs include both education and training. Although some of the early worker education programs took place in universities, today most of the large unions have their own HRD staffs.

What Is the Extent of HRD Activity?

Because of its nature, it is difficult, if not impossible, to assess the amount of HRD activity conducted annually in the United States precisely. A number of different estimates have been made about the amount of employee training, but the one widely considered the most reliable is that of Robert Craig of ASTD (Carnevale and Goldstein 1983). According to Craig, American employers spend between $30 and $40 billion a year to train their employees. He also estimates that half of the nation's employees—approximately 50 million—are receiving training (Craig and Evers 1981). These figures, however, do not account for job-related education that individuals may be pursuing on their own.

Who Provides HRD Programs?

Nonschool institutions provide over 55 percent of job-related training for adults, with educational institutions providing the balance. The largest single providers of HRD are business firms, accounting for nearly 34 percent of the total. Four-year colleges and universities are the next largest providers at 16 percent. Thus, it appears that employee training by employers is by far the largest delivery system for job-related adult education (Carnevale and Goldstein 1983).

How Can Educational Institutions Link with Business and Industry to Provide HRD for Employees?

There are many examples of effective cooperation and linkages between educational institutions and business and industry in providing HRD. Nadler (1983) has identified some key areas that affect the success of such ventures. These include the following:

- **Commitment to Developing a Mutual Relationship**—Educators frequently do not take time to develop an understanding of HRD in business and industry or to seek ways to meet training needs effectively. Making a commitment to develop a mutual relationship with business and industry may involve (1) changing course locations from campus to the workplace and (2) developing flexible scheduling, curriculum, and programs that will meet the needs of workers.
- **Research**—Although there is general agreement that research is needed in HRD, little is being conducted. Cooperative research efforts would be beneficial to both educators and employers. Educators need to keep in mind that business and industry will not be interested in devoting resources to research unless management can see the benefits to be derived.
- **Exchange of Personnel**—Exchanging personnel between business and industry and educational institutions is a practice that has much to offer all concerned, but unfortunately, few personnel exchanges take place. Personnel exchanges can increase contact between individuals in education and those in the private sector and lead to increased understanding of each other's roles.

What Is the Future of HRD?

Current trends indicate that HRD will play an increasingly important role in the future. Demographic, technological, and international trends have created comparable shifts in the structure of economic policy. Emerging economic policies, known as "reindustrialization," "economic revitalization," and "industrial policy," contain human resource components that shift the public interest from traditional concerns of educating the young and providing pre-vocational training to a concern with increasing productivity among employed workers (Carnevale and Goldstein 1983). Human resource development activities will be an important means of implementing these policies.

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